

The New Colossus

By Emma Lazarus

*Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*



Interviewee: MORRIS ABRAHAM SCHNEIDER
Date of Birth: May 3, 1910
Date of Interview: November 17, 1991
Interviewer: Paul E. Sigrist, Jr.
Immigrated from Poland in 1920 at age 10
Ellis Island Collection: EI-116

Schneider:

When we got on the Rotterdam, we had a field day. One, I was never on ship before and it was absolutely, I was awed by it. It was overwhelming. All the people and boarding the ship, it was all a brand new experience. We left Rotterdam, we set sail and about a half hour after the ship started my sister got very sea sick. It took us fourteen days to cross the Atlantic and in the entire crossing, she was in steerage, and the only time she came up for a breath of fresh air was just about a half hour before we saw the Statue of Liberty. Now the experience of the ship, being young was an adventure in that particular situation, because we were on the lowest level of the ship. We couldn't go aboard. Some kids were more adventurous. My brother and I, we would sneak aboard, we were always chased. And we saw some people who traveled maybe in first or second class and we looked upon them as royalty, but we were confined primarily to steerage.

Steerage was one huge place. It was the lowest deck. The stench, it was the summer, in August, the humidity, the heat, having no air conditioning, having cooling facilities, it was very hot, compounded by the fact that there must have been anywhere from two to three hundred people in that huge cavernous area. The body smells, the body odors, the lack of sanitation, the lack of any kind of facilities, washing, there was no such thing as washing or bathing. The stench, the vermin, it was rat infested. But, being children, I guess, had its advantages, in this case because we always tried to get out of there. We tried to go, get out of the steerage, get out of the babble of voices, get out of the heat and the stench and get on the main deck. We all were permitted to stay there for a little while but we were constantly chased. But the crossing went for us, for me in particular, went very quickly.



Interviewee: KATHLEEN MAGENNIS LAMBERTI

Date of Birth: NOVEMBER 6, 1898

Date of Interview: FEBRUARY 25, 1994

Immigrated from Ireland in 1921 at Age 22

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

Ellis Island Collection: EI-439

SIGRIST: Tell me what that first night in America was like?

SIGRIST: So she fed you?

LAMBERTI: She fed, oh, yes, she fed us. (she laughs)

And my Uncle Joe brought in, he brought in a pizza pie. And I, we looked at that and they said, "Now, this is pizza pie." And Mother said, "Oh, what is that?" This dreadful looking stuff. It was awful. Mother said, "Mmm." Didn't eat that. Well, we were very disappointed. When we got his back turned we put it out. We threw it out. But we didn't, we didn't know what it was. To eat tomatoes in a pie. That was dreadful. (she laughs) Then, but we did grow to love it.

Ellis Island Oral Interview

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Education Department
Ellis Island Immigration Museum
Statue of Liberty National Monument



Interviewee: Gertrude (Gudrun) Hildebrandt Moller

Date of Birth: June 15, 1920

Date of Interview: October 5, 1992

Interviewer: Janet Levine, Ph.D

Immigrated from Germany in 1929 at Age 9

Ellis Island Collection: EI-222

Moller (Name Change in School):

I was born Gudrun Hildebrandt and married Moller, Mr. Moller, who was from Denmark. He immigrated here many years later and we met in New York. However when I started school in Chicago, where I grew up, needless to say, first of all, I couldn't speak a word of English, and I was the only child in the school that couldn't speak English. And (she laughs) it wasn't too happy the first couple of years but my mama said "Take heart because some day you're going to be able to speak two languages and all the ones that were teasing you will speak only one". And it was true. She was always right. So, my teacher suggested, since none of the children could pronounce Gudrun, which is an old Germanic-Scandinavian name, and a very beautiful name (I hear), she gave me a list of girls' names to choose from. So that all the kids could converse, you know, know what to call me. So I picked the name starting with a g, as with my name, and it was Gertrude. I'm not very happy with it, but it has stuck with me all of these years.

Ellis Island Oral Interview

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Education Department
Ellis Island Immigration Museum
Statue of Liberty National Monument



Interviewee: Emma and William Greiner

Date of Birth: December 30, 1913 and July 18, 1912

Date of Interview: March 3, 1991

Interviewer: Paul E. Sigrist, Jr.

Immigrated from Italy (on German and French Quotas) at Age 11 and 12 in 1925

Ellis Island Collection: EI-28

Greiner (What He Packed):

EMMA: Yes, yes. It was very disrupting, you know, to pack and break up your home.

Oh, we took, of course, our clothing and some pieces of like china that were very, very special. And maybe a blanket or two also that were real good wool, that we felt maybe we may not be able to get here in the United States.

WILLIAM: Of course, there was pressure to leave things there but they accommodated us kids. And I brought a lot of things that (he laughs) I now wonder why I was so attached, for instance, to greeting cards. They were very, very romantic in those days and they were through the years birthdays and so on. And a few toys. My tin soldiers. I don't remember whether I brought anything about my small railroad, um.

WILLIAM: Oh, yes, yes. And then I had, uh, what we called a "Magic Lantern." It was a... Projector.

Very, very primitive, (he laughs) compared to today's.

EMMA: And I was hoping he wouldn't bring those soldiers because when we played together at home, you see I was German and he was French, you know, and he would always decimate all my soldiers, kill them all off, so we had quite a different set in our lives...(she laughs)

Ellis Island Oral Interview

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Education Department
Ellis Island Immigration Museum
Statue of Liberty National Monument



Interviewee: William Greiner

Date of Birth: July 18, 1912

Date of Interview: March 3, 1991

Interviewer: Paul E. Sigrist, Jr.

Immigrated from Italy (on German Quota) at Age 12 in 1925

Ellis Island Collection: EI-28

Greiner (The Voyage):

It's hard for people to understand today what it was like to be on a boat then in a storm like that. Tremendous noise. It sounded as if the boat was heading for some rocks. The great waves would smash, the noise tremendous, and I thought we would flounder at any moment. They posted Morse Code, messages received from other ships in the ocean, sending "S.O.S. We are floundering!" and so on, "Help!" and the captain let us know that he couldn't get out of the way. They were hard pressed, too. So they wanted to get to New York as soon as possible... all the other people were so sick. But I get over very quickly any sickness. I would go up on the captain's deck and I enjoyed this wild sight, and especially looking at the prow of the ship going way, way down under the sea and then lifting up. And the waves coming, rushing right up to the captain's...to live...that's a terrifying scene but, as a boy, I enjoyed it.